

JOHN HOLLIS BANKHEAD HOUSE  
(Sunset House)  
Birmingham Industrial District  
1400 Seventh Ave.  
Jasper  
Walker County  
Alabama

HABS No. AL-979

HABS  
ALA  
64-JAS,  
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

ADDENDUM TO  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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ADDENDUM TO  
JOHN HOLLIS BANKHEAD HOUSE  
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HABS No. AL-979

Location: 1400 Seventh Avenue, Jasper, Walker County, Alabama.

Ownership: Dr. Steve Johnson

Date of Construction: c. 1900

Project Information: This report is based on written documentation donated by the Birmingham Historical Society, reformatted to HABS/HAER guidelines.

Description: This two-story frame Neo-Classical Revival style house with hip roof and full, open front and side porches is set atop a hillside estate along Seventh Avenue in an historic residential area of this county seat and coal mining center.

Significance: The Bankhead House is the long-time home of John Hollis Bankhead, Sr. whose efforts to develop waterways, roads and industrial enterprise strongly impacted the District's economic development. As a Congressman and Senator for 33 years, Bankhead chaired committees on canals and waterways, post offices and public buildings, and introduced legislation implementing federal highways. His efforts to channelize the Warrior River provided access for the District to southern ports and international markets.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

John Hollis Bankhead, Sr. resided here from 1906, the year of his election to the U. S. Senate, until his death in 1920. Previous to that time, during his years of service to the Alabama legislature and the U. S. Congress, Bankhead resided at the family homeplace, still standing in Marion County. His father, George Bankhead, a planter and stock grower, built this property as well as the first mill near Russellville in Marion County. His son, John Hollis Bankhead, Jr., a lawyer, coal mine operator and also a U. S. Congressman, resided here after his father's death. Actress Tallulah Bankhead, granddaughter of John Sr., grew up in the house in the 1910s while her father, William Brockman Bankhead, younger son of John, Sr., also served in the U. S. Congress.

Civil War veteran, planter, lawyer, coal mine operator, and politician John Hollis Bankhead, Sr. (1842-1920) served in the state legislature before serving 33 years in the U. S. House and U. S. Senate. In the early 1880s, as warden of the state penitentiary, he recommended reform schools for youthful offenders and abolished the use of small cellular sleeping quarters and instruments for discipline.

Elected to the U. S. Congress in 1887, in this year he began service on the committee on rivers and harbors, a committee he later chaired. In this capacity, he assisted development of waterway projects throughout the nation. Through his efforts, the shoal-studded Warrior River, which several of his Congressional colleagues suggested might more easily be filled with concrete, was effectively channelized 455 miles from the coal fields of Walker County, passing major industrial operations at Cordova, Birmingham, Holt and Tuscaloosa in the District, to the port of Mobile, also improved at this time as a deep water port. Construction of 19 locks and dams, effectively creating this major southeastern waterway, continued through World War I. Bankhead also served as chairman of the committee on public buildings and post offices, in which capacity he presided over the construction of the Library of Congress.

Bankhead's principal service, however, came in improving roads across the nation. On July 11, 1916, he procured passage of an act to aid the states in construction of rural post-roads, the "Good Roads Act." In recognition his name was given to one of two early transcontinental highways which extended from Washington to the Pacific Ocean through Birmingham and Jasper, the Bankhead Highway, now US 78.

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